

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1804

June 9, 2014

The Honorable Charles Boustany
Longworth House Office Building
Room 1431
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Fleming
Cannon House Office Building
Room 416
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Longworth House Office Building
Room 1131
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Vance McAllister
Cannon House Office Building
Room 316
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Scalise
Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2338
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Boustany, Congressman Cassidy, Congressman Fleming, Congressman McAllister, and Congressman Scalise:

This fall, thousands of Louisianians will step onto college campuses across the state to begin their freshman year—some that are newly minted high school graduates and some that are parents or workers starting a new path. For each of those students, it will be an opportunity to achieve a prosperous future. While Louisiana students fare better than students in other states in regards to an affordable college experience, their costs continue to rise each year. For many, it will be the beginning of taking on crushing student loan debt that can be an economic burden for years to come.

Today, due to the rising cost of college, student loan debt is over \$1.2 trillion—more than credit card debt. Now is the time to ensure that our students have a fair shot to build a prosperous future in a competitive and global economy.

I hope you will join me to provide Louisiana students and families with a passport to the middle class by supporting two pieces of commonsense legislation that increases college access and affordability. I urge you to cosponsor H.R. 4852, the Bank on Students Emergency Loan Refinancing Act introduced by Congressman John Tierney (D-Mass.) which allows both borrowers with private and federal undergraduate loans to re-finance at 3.86%, the current undergraduate rate agreed upon in the Bipartisan Student Loan Certainty Act. In Louisiana, there are nearly 600,000 student loan borrowers with an average debt of \$22,789. I also urge you to cosponsor the Middle Class CHANCE Act that is being introduced by Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (D-CA). This bill will increase the annual Pell grant award to a maximum of \$8,900, restore year-round Pell grants, and allow Pell recipients to access grants for 15 semesters instead of the current 12 semesters. These changes are critically important not only to moderate-to-low income students working their way through school, but also to our many parents and families struggling to raise

children and attend school themselves.

A college degree should help build dreams, not debt. When you work hard and play by the rules, you deserve a fair shot to build a prosperous future and bridge to the middle class. But, unfortunately the higher education budget in our state has suffered drastic cuts of nearly \$700 million since 2008. According to the most recent report from the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, this is more than any other state in the nation has cut in the last five years. I firmly believe that this is the time to invest in the education of our workforce, not deplete its resources. The ripple effect of doing so is staggering. Rising tuition costs and fees by force students and their families to take out more debt to pay for their post-secondary education. Increased debt for students continues to impact our economy in Louisiana and the country as fewer graduates are unable to make large purchase like cars, homes, or even long term investments in their futures because of the huge amounts of debt they incurred in school. At colleges across Louisiana, lack of funding creates poor conditions on campus, including failing infrastructure, loss of employees, program cuts, staff turnover, and increased student-to-teacher ratio.

If Louisiana students are going to succeed in the 21st century global economy, we must do everything we can to make a college education more affordable. I ask that you support these commonsense pieces of legislation to ensure that all students, including those new college freshmen from Louisiana, have the opportunity to gain the knowledge and training necessary to lead our state to a prosperous future, without being weighed down by debt.

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu
United States Senator

MLL/ekm